

The Snows of Timpanogus

THE LAST Word



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SPECIAL TO THE COURIER

In Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," his protagonist passes the last few days of his life alternately staring at the big mountain of Africa and the minor trappings of his immediate surroundings, desperately searching for some final insight that might pull the two together. On a tour of the Serengeti plain that was supposed to be some type of launch into a new life's direction, his leg had been pricked by a thorn and had in turn become infected, and now each hour passed as sand in the hour-

glass—steady, predictable, and with a definite end in sight.

In typical Hemingway fashion, the character frets over his own wasted potential but never recovers it. And in the end, death — as always — has the last word.

It is a powerful story because it deals with universal themes: life, promise, death, finality, and as a reader you are forced to experience vicariously the certain dread of having to leave one's life "unfinished." True, it is only fiction, and true, it is a rare person indeed who ever finishes his or her entire "To Do" list before passing on in real life (Hemingway included!), but any reminder of one's mortality — real or literary — hits hard.

Sometimes.

Truth is, we are all in the same predicament as Hemingway's anti-hero, for we are all — by definition — faced with our own end. We live our lives with one eye cast up at Timpanogus, and the other trying to make sense of the trappings of daily life. Most of us are well aware of our limited days, and many of us have every intention to fill up those left with great feats of daring-do.

But we don't. We make resolutions, maybe even start that novel or letter to the editor, but we break the former with impunity, and set aside the latter months later convinced of its lack of sophistication. We talk high and long about the need for reform,

and change, and even revolution, but when it comes right down to it, we are usually victims of our own lack of inertia, for, as we all learned in high school—a body at rest will stay at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. Or, in Thomas Jefferson's political restatement, we "suffer, while evils are sufferable, [rather] than right...[ourselves] by abolishing the forms to which...[we] are accustomed."

Why? Why doesn't the certain knowledge of our own impending death make us rise earlier, run faster, work harder, and love deeper? Why do we not climb to the snows of Kilimanjaro or Timpanogus instead of hoping they will somehow be included as part of a grand exit tour?

Perhaps we play it safe, hoping that in the end an intimate knowledge with the familiar will somehow justify the freezing of our talents, the damning of our progress. If it's true that by age three, all of the elements of our future lives are in place, perhaps we lacked proper stimulation and can blame parents. But isn't it just a little strange that we would have the presence-of-mind to diagnose our situation but no ability to cure it? I suspect that whatever the reasons may be that we lose energy, will, and vision, they are not connected to the deterioration of the body or even of the mind. We are taught by the ancients (and reminded by our own conscience) that "long is the day, and sufficient is the time thereof" to make

a mark, to right a wrong, to Live — with a capital L.

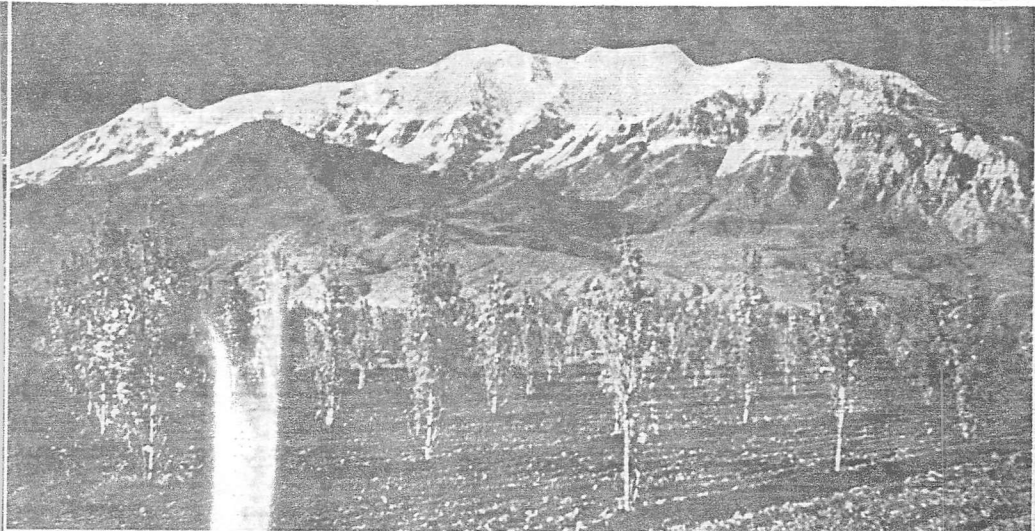
Despite our inability to know how long our days will last, that ignorance really shouldn't change much. Whether we die tomorrow or in forty years, we cannot know, therefore we must proceed forward either way. We know our Start date and we know there will be a Finish Line — within our control is how we run the race. Tomorrow is a mystery, but today is tangible — it is here and now and begging to be fulfilled. What a gift that is!

Today I might forgive and thereby be forgiven. I might love and lose, or love and win — who can say? I might take the first steps of a long and glorious journey; I might lay the first stones for a foundation of something that will change the world forever.

We face the world in all directions and must see that as long as we live and breathe we have the power to create. Said a minor character once in a minor movie: "Most of the world is asleep, and those who are awake walk around in a state of constant amazement!" Life should be more than just probation, more than mere survival. I like that storyline better.

I like it especially as I gaze southwest up to the Snows of Timpanogus.

Matthew Heimburger is a professor of American civilization at Brigham Young University. He lives here in the Heber Valley with his wife and son.



Mount Timpanogos looms over an orchard at Pleasant Grove where early in June this year the 25th annual "Utah Strawberry Day" will be held. Located near the Geneva steel plant, Pleasant Grove is noted for its fruits and vegetables and as a Holstein and Guernsey dairy center.

Courtesy PLEASANT GROVE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, FIROS CLUB and PLEASANT GROVE CITY